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Co-Chairs

Mr. Gagan Sikand

The Honourable Lucie Moncion

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● (1200)

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Mr. Gagan Sikand (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.)): The committee is now in session.

Welcome, everyone.

Welcome, witnesses.

For the first half of the committee meeting, I think Senator Moncion will proceed. If we have enough time to discuss the moving of the library, I'll take over at that point.

Senator Moncion.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion (Senator, Ontario, ISG)): Thank you very much.

I will begin by offering the members and anyone who is affected by the death of Mr. Brown sincere condolences on my behalf, as well as on the behalf of my office and the Senate of Canada.

As my colleague said, we will divide the meeting.

We will begin by talking about Parliament—in other words, the information on all the work being done in Parliament. In the meantime, we will respond to Mr. Van Kesteren's concern with regard to the publication of documentation on the Library of Parliament website.

Without further ado, I invite the librarian.... Ms. L'Heureux, I may not be using your exact title and I don't mean to insult you.

Ms. L'Heureux is joined by Ms. Bebbington, Ms. MacLeod and Ms. Potter. They will talk to us about the library's work, and we will then move on to questions and answers.

Go ahead, Ms. L'Heureux.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux (Parliamentary Librarian, Library of Parliament): Thank you.

Honourable Senators, members of Parliament, joint chairs, it is my pleasure to address the committee today regarding the Library of Parliament's main estimates for 2018-2019.

I apologize for my voice, which seems to be failing me this morning. I hope I can continue to engage in discussion with you until the end of the meeting.

I am accompanied by my colleagues, who are members of the Library Executive Committee. Together, we should be able to answer your questions.

It has been several years since we had an opportunity to meet with members of this committee. Therefore, even though I know that many among you rely on services provided by the Library of Parliament, I will briefly remind the committee of the nature and scope of the library's service offering.

[*English*]

The library is Parliament's trusted source of information, research, and analysis, providing bilingual, non-partisan, and confidential services to senators and members of Parliament, and to parliamentary committees and associations.

Our multidisciplinary team of employees also provides daily online news clipping services and customized alerts to help you keep pace with issues in the media. Our librarians are available to answer your reference questions and to help you search our extensive print and digital collections. We also regularly host public policy seminars and other learning opportunities designed to meet your needs. We provide information kits and classroom sets to help parliamentarians inform Canadians about Parliament. Of course, we also offer guided tours to visitors and the people you bring to Parliament.

In all of this we always strive to evolve and modernize in order to maintain the flexibility needed to support the parliamentarians we serve.

As you may be aware, the library benefited last fiscal year, in 2017-18, from an increase in its resources, and I would like to take a moment to outline how we are using these additional resources to support Parliament, before I turn my attention to this year's main estimates.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

The library supports approximately 50 Senate and House parliamentary committees, and 13 parliamentary associations. We are also available to answer requests from over 440 parliamentarians.

Following the election of the 42nd Parliament and numerous appointments in the Senate, we witnessed a 25% increase in demand from parliamentarians for requests for information and research on public policy issues, many presenting in-depth and increasingly complex challenges. Increased demand was noted across political parties.

[*English*]

By capturing and tracking key usage data, the library provided evidence of the need to increase resource levels to sustain our research, information, and analysis services. Through discussions with the Speaker of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Commons, we were able to secure a $4-million increase in permanent funding in the 2017-18 main estimates to respond to a higher volume of requests and sustain an expanded service offering in future years.

The resources that were provided to the library were used to hire 37 new employees to strengthen our research capacity and to better manage the overall volume and complexity of requests. With these resources we also addressed a need for expertise in four emerging priority areas: gender-based analysis+; international affairs; enhanced visual elements for items such as research publications and committee reports; and committee-related communications.

I would now like to turn to today's topic, the main estimates for 2018-19. Relative to the previous years, the 2018-19 main estimates for the library are increasing by $329,000.

[*Translation*]

This includes a reduction of $2.6 million related to the separation of the Parliamentary Budget Office from the library. It also reflects the end of temporary funding before the implementation of an enterprise resources program to modernize and integrate the library's management of financial and human resources.

Furthermore, the library is seeking additional additional funds in three areas to: manage financial pressures related to the collection; create a virtual experience of Centre Block; and cover economic increases to the remuneration of a sub-group of employees.

[*English*]

Let me start with the collection pressures. One of the principal ways in which we achieve our goal of supporting an informed Parliament is through a collection that is responsive, balanced, and relevant.

With the increase in demand for research and reference services came a 28% increase in usage of the electronic collection. In parallel, the library had to respond to cost increases for information resources, which diminished our buying power over that same time period. Further, business models and monopolies in publishing resulted in the library having to purchase bundled packages on a subscription basis and requiring year-to-year financial commitments. Publishers determine the price and increases can be set unilaterally, creating pressures on the collection budget.

Our ability to manage within the collection budget envelope had decreased to an unsustainable point, just as the pressures to respond to requests were mounting. With the additional funding in this year's main estimates, we will stabilize the collection budget, broaden access to key electronic products, increase business and industry-specific information resources, expand licences to allow for news content redistribution in media monitoring products, and develop the library's capacity to continue to digitize key historical parliamentary publications.

The second item of note in our estimates is related to the development of a high-quality virtual reality experience. To ensure ongoing public access to the history and majesty of Centre Block during the years of its closure and to educate the public on the art, architecture, people, and function of Parliament taking place in the building, the library is partnering with the National Film Board to produce a virtual experience of Parliament.

The first phase of the project, which will be launched after Centre Block closes for renovations, involves a 2-D and 3-D online visit of Parliament, using narration and the actual soundscape recording in Centre Block. A supporting education program with curriculum-focused resources is also being developed for classrooms across Canada. For phase two, through the use of cutting-edge production technologies, visitors to the national capital region will explore all the sights and sounds of Centre Block in a fully immersive virtual reality experience to be physically located in Ottawa. The library is seeking $2.02 million for this project in the 2018-19 main estimates.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Also included in the 2018-2019 main estimates is $1.025 million for economic adjustments for the library's PSAC-represented staff and unrepresented staff. These increases are tied to the most recent round of negotiations with PSAC. Historically, we have determined the economic increases for unrepresented employees once negotiated agreements have been reached with our unionized groups.

[*English*]

In light of the fact that this committee is initiating its work for this parliamentary session, I would like to highlight two areas that may be of interest to the committee, although they are not related specifically to the main estimates process.

As we look to the future, the library is busy preparing for the upcoming closure of Centre Block. The main library will also be closing for the duration of the renovations. In preparation, the main library collection will be distributed among several branches, according to branch specializations and user needs.

The bulk of the collection will be transferred to our facility at 45 Sacré-Coeur in Gatineau, including the rare book collection.

The library's branch at 125 Sparks Street will become the interim main library for the duration of the closure of Centre Block. Currently under renovation to modernize the branch, 125 Sparks will act as a hub for new technology and resources and will provide expertise for research requests and orientation on library services.

Easy access to in-person library service will continue at the new branches being opened in West Block and the Government Conference Centre. Service will also continue to be provided at our branches in the Wellington and Confederation buildings. All branches will provide modern library services with a special focus on technological innovation, collaborative space, and enhanced experience for our users.

[*Translation*]

You will continue to have uninterrupted access to the library's print and digital collections at any one of our six points of service. As has always been the case, books can be delivered to the easiest point of access upon request.

The upcoming closure of Centre Block has also required us to realign our visitor services program. To maintain public access to Parliament, tours of West Block and the Government Conference Centre will be offered throughout the duration of Centre Block's closure.

The public will have access to both buildings to attend debates in the public galleries and to observe committee meetings. Tours of the Government Conference Centre and of West Block will include a visit of the interim chambers, with stops in the public galleries and on the floors of both Chambers. Tour groups will also visit a committee room and learn about the transformation of the heritage buildings that will house the two chambers.

[*English*]

Members of the public will access tours of West Block through the new visitor welcome centre, which will serve as the public entrance to West Block. This new facility will also house an expanded Parliamentary Boutique.

As you can see, over the next few years our technological and physical environment will change significantly, but our raison d'être remains to provide information for and about Parliament that people can trust. We have a strategic outlook for 2017-22 that presents the priorities that will guide us as an organization as we fulfill our mandate over the medium term. Committee members can consult the strategic outlook using the link to our website, which I have provided to the joint clerks.

The strategic outlook also highlights some of the initiatives we have identified to move the organization forward. Emphasis is placed on remaining relevant by providing the right products and services, on increasing the library's agility in the face of change, and on maintaining a healthy workplace for employees. This will enable us to continue to be responsive and relevant to Parliament.

● (1215)

[*Translation*]

Finally, the library will also be undergoing a change in leadership in June with my upcoming retirement. This committee may be called upon in the coming weeks to meet with the future nominee for the position of parliamentary librarian. Until my departure, I am happy to discuss any matters related to the library that are of interest to this committee.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today. We are pleased to answer your questions.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you very much, Ms. L'Heureux.

[*English*]

I'll open the floor to questions.

Senator Mercer is first on the list, and then Ms. Quach.

Hon. Terry M. Mercer (Senator, Nova Scotia (Northend Halifax), Lib.): First of all, thank you for being here. It's about time we had a meeting. It's good to see you.

You described the use of various buildings in the parliamentary precinct when Centre Block is closed, but you left out the use of East Block. I'm curious about that. East Block, of course, holds the original offices of Sir John A. Macdonald, George-Étienne Cartier, and the Governor General. The original cabinet room is still there. It's a terrific tour for tourists. I do the tour for people all the time, because my office happens to be in East Block.

You didn't mention the use of East Block, and I think we're missing an opportunity. It will be the most historic place still available while the renovations of Centre Block are going on.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: You're quite right. I forgot to mention East Block. Nothing is changing with East Block. We continue to provide those tours.

I don't know, Catherine, if you have anything to add to this issue.

Ms. Catherine MacLeod (Assistant Parliamentary Librarian, Library of Parliament): Yes.

As you suggest, it's a very important location for tours. It's historic. We made the decision that those tours will continue during the 10-year closure period.

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: Will you still use young people in period costumes to do some of the tours?

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: They're not so much in period costumes. They're student guides from the same guide group that provides tours of Centre Block. They're specially trained in the history of East Block. That will continue.

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: For colleagues around the table, if you haven't taken a tour of East Block and you're a new member of Parliament, you shouldn't miss it this summer. There's history there. Sir John A.'s office is in its original form. The cabinet room that was used up until the time of Mr. Pearson is there in its original form, as is a small meeting room off of it that was used by Sir John A.

With respect to expanding the boutique in West Block, are we expanding not just the square footage but also the products available in the boutique? In particular, I've been disappointed to see that the boutique continues to drop items with Senate markings on them. Are we going to fix that?

Ms. Catherine MacLeod: I'll take note of your comment around the Senate markings. We'll have to check back.

I will say that we have been gearing up in the boutique. We've introduced 150 new original products for the boutique this past year, and our sales have gone up even in the current location by 25%, so we're hoping that with the new location and the expanded space, we can continue with that positive momentum. We are definitely interested in checking back and talking about the Senate markings. That is an important point.

Thank you.

Hon. Terry M. Mercer: Thank you, Chair.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you, Senator Mercer.

The next person is Ms. Quach.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all for being here. It is rare for us to hear from only women, and it's a nice change.

Ms. L'Heureux, I am very happy to finally be able to meet you, even though you are preparing to leave.

I have a number of questions to ask, and one of them concerns the Privy Council, which is in charge of creating electronic documents related to written questions. Those written questions are then printed on paper. There is no electronic version of that. The documents are filed electronically, and you have to scan everything before you hand it over.

Would it be possible for the Privy Council to send you those electronic versions? Have you ever asked for that? What was the answer? Is it possible?

Time and resources seem to be wasted on scanning and digitizing all those documents.

● (1220)

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: Thank you for question. It is pretty technical. I will try to answer it despite my hoarseness. I may yield the floor to my colleague.

I think that we provided the members of the committee with a briefing note. Essentially, your are correct. We receive printed copies and, in 2010, we started to digitize them by scanning the documents that arrive in a variety of forms and with all sorts of characters that are difficult to pick up. Those are really what we refer to as copies to facilitate the work of parliamentarians and people who request them from us. We do not receive them electronically. Those documents are produced by government departments that are coordinated by the Privy Council, and they are then sent to the House of Commons.

Paper versions are still used. I know that my colleagues from the House are currently in discussions with the Privy Council to try to find a solution to that problem. We are unable to work with digitized documents

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: They are already producing them on computers, right?

If the documents are already digitized, it seems to me more logical for them to be sent to you in that format, perhaps by email.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: You are absolutely right.

Those documents are created digitally, but they are sent and submitted to the House of Commons in printed form. Our hands are kind of tied. We don't officially have access to the digital versions of those documents, which is why we need to work with our colleagues from the House of Commons.

I think that, in the note that has been distributed, there is a quote from my colleague the Clerk of the House of Commons, who referred to that intention following the success people from his office had with electronic petitions. They managed to move the file forward, and they hope to be able to repeat the same procedure with other parliamentary documents, including questions on the order paper, following their conversations with the Privy Council.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Would it help you if the committee drafted a motion to be brought to the Privy Council in order to accelerate the process?

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: I cannot really advise you on the procedural aspect, in terms of the best way to get things moving. However, it is clear that it would not harm the cause if parliamentarians spoke out and wanted those documents to be available electronically. There may be conditions in terms of procedure or document production I am unaware of that must be taken into consideration.

Ms. Bebbington, do you have anything to add about discussions with the House of Commons?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington (Director General, Information and Document Resource Service, Library of Parliament): As Ms. L'Heureux said, right now, electronic petitions are a success. That is one of the series our clients asked us to digitize. Now we no longer need to digitize that series of electronic petitions. We hope that a process essentially different from the digitization of paper documents will work just as well for the series of written questions.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Okay.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): We will put your name on the list for the second round if you like.

Mr. Iacono, go ahead.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): The Library of Parliament is an essential resource, both for members and for senators. Its work in terms of research, references and analysis is precious. Before I begin, I wanted to thank you for all those services.

Ms. L'Heureux, I first want to wish you a happy retirement, which will be well deserved. I also want to thank you for all the work you have done, for your dedication to the library and the services you have provided to senators and members.

You point out that the request for additional funding focuses on three main areas. I would like us to focus on the first one, which is about managing financial pressures related to the collection, but especially the point concerning an increase in costs related to information resources.

Could you elaborate on that situation?

● (1225)

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: I will ask Ms. Bebbington, who is in charge of the collection, to answer your question.

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: Thank you for your question.

It is clear that, in the publication world, information has to be purchased. Quality information is not free. We rely on quality information, and there is, of course, a cost related to that.

With the model where collections are purchased, especially digital collections, the main issue is the price of membership, which is paid every year. Their percentage increase is fairly standard. That aspect is also subject to copyright. It is impossible to get the same information, in the same way, from a provider who asks for less. If we really need a scientific journal to answer a specific question, we will not really find the information elsewhere for less.

Investment must be made for us to be able to purchase quality information Parliament needs to do its work. Publication models really represent a challenge, but that increase enables us to ensure sustainability for a few years.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's fine, thank you.

Between 2012 and 2013 and 2014 and 2015, the library's financial resources were reduced as part of the Strategic and Operating Review.

What were the repercussions of that reduction?

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: My voice is hoarse. Perhaps my colleague Ms. Potter could answer that question.

Ms. Lynn Potter (Chief Financial Officer and Director General, Business Support Services, Library of Parliament): The Speakers asked us to reduce our budget by 2.5% before the end of fiscal 2014-2015, and we did that. However, we had to reduce it by an additional 7%. At that time, operating budgets had been frozen for two years. So we had to do some reassignments in order to be able to pay our employees' salary increases. We also had other operations that year. At the end of the third year, in 2014-2015, we reached our objective, which was to reduce our budget by 2.5%, or about $3.5 million.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: What were the biggest challenges you faced following that reduction?

Ms. Lynn Potter: Since 80% of the library's budget goes to salaries, the biggest challenge was to manage the cuts so that they would have the least possible impact on the employees, while also being able to provide the necessary services to parliamentarians.

We focused on attrition as much as possible. We also made some cuts to initiatives that were less important, and we emphasized services to parliamentarians. We eliminated 36 positions at the library, especially management and administrative assistant positions, and positions in internal services.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Van Kesteren.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Leamington, CPC): Thank you.

Welcome to our second meeting this year, and probably the second meeting in four years, as I understand.

Way back in 2014, this committee passed a unanimous motion—and I assume, Madam Chair, that I can make this request at this time—instructing the library to put the answers to Order Paper questions, which were sessional papers, on the public website. They were already on the Intraparl website.

However, they don't appear to be on the public website yet. It has been about four years since the motion passed. Are these sessional papers now available on the public website, and if not, when will they be?

● (1230)

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: I don't know if you read the note that we circulated to the members through the clerks about the sessional papers, but for a number of reasons, mostly technical, we could not progress as far as we wanted in alignment with the motion in 2014. The documents can be viewed publicly through our catalogue. They reside in our catalogue, and they are the scanned copies that we produced for convenience. The challenge with these copies is that they do not meet accessibility standards. Given that the committee did not meet for four years, we did not have an opportunity to come back and talk about the challenge that we were having in addressing the accessibility issues.

We did a pilot a few years ago, during which we took 10 documents, a sample, to see how much work it would be to go from the scanned copy that we have to something that would meet accessibility standards. Something that would take 20 minutes on 10 documents requires two and a half hours to bring to an accessible level. Given the competing pressures that we were having with the 25% increase in demand in research and reference, and in general demand on the library, we weren't able to progress on that front.

As I mentioned earlier today, the House of Commons is moving to discuss with the Privy Council Office the creation of those documents in a digitized fashion that meets accessibility standards and that could be made available to the public through the journals, I believe.

Sonia may have something she can add on that topic.

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: What seems to be envisaged right now is that they'll be available through the journals and will be potentially searchable within a separate database as well, although we're in a preliminary phase of that project.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Why can't we make these scanned versions available on the public site now?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: We can make them available. It will take a small technical change, but there is a risk related to accessibility requirements that we'd like the committee to understand. These scanned versions don't meet the accessibility requirements, and that can result in a human rights complaint. It's just a case of understanding that risk.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Would you agree that this is essential, that this is a good idea, and that we should be moving in this direction?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: As a librarian—

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: I think that we will do whatever Parliament wants, but we're also very concerned about putting ourselves in a situation that may generate complaints with regard to human rights.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Are you making a recommendation that we forgo this request and maybe backtrack? I'm a little confused.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: I would suggest that maybe we take a pause. Given that the House of Commons has clearly indicated that it is working with the generators of those documents—the executive—to make them not only digitally available but also accessible, we should let those conversations take place to make sure that they can be offered through the journals.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: You've had an increase in the last year. Is money the issue? Do we still have insufficient funds to do what's necessary, or are you bringing forward other areas?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: Going to the source of the document so that you're dealing with a document that's born digitally is much more efficient than having a library that receives a second or third generation print version try to reverse-engineer accessibility into that file.

In terms of efficiency and use of those resources, it's much more efficient to go to the source and deal with documents as they're born digitally.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: That's it.

Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you.

Mr. Ouellette.

● (1235)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Can you tell me how many people worked in that four-year period on the file Mr. Van Kesteren referred to? What was the involvement of IT and others to make this project a success?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: Two people work on digitization in my team. In addition, one team works on description and metadata. The manager of that team did the study on what we would need to make those documents accessible. I think it took two months to do the research on the accessibility standards and to test the ways of changing the documents to make them accessible.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: In your study, did you look at other countries of the world that have had the same problems, such as the Library of Congress, or the United Kingdom, or Australia or other European countries that probably have more stringent laws on accessibility than we do, but successfully implemented considerable transparency for government files?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: The most similar case I know is that of England.

There is indeed a tabling process right from the beginning, in the departments. That process is exactly what House of Commons colleagues would like to see.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: In order to take this project to fruition, the project of ensuring the transparency of those files, are you expecting an order or direction from the committee, or are you going to wait another four years? In fact, the committee had not met for four years. Are you waiting for Privy Council to make the request? Could you tell us where the blockage is in that system so that we may succeed and implement the directive given in 2014?

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: We don't want to put the library or Parliament at risk because of accessibility. That is why we have not moved on this file.

In the meantime, we began discussions with the House and our administration counterparts, who undertook discussions with the Privy Council. I am not aware of the reasons why, but they began their work with the petitions. I think the 2014 motion had more to do with the questions on the *order paper*.

In light of the progress that was made at the House, we decided to pause to see what the discussions with the House would lead to. According to recent conversations that were held last week, they are continuing their discussions, and apparently Privy Council is now more willing to move forward.

I'm not certain that there is a "blockage", but as my colleague suggested, the intervention should really be brought to bear on the production of the document as such. But we are not in a position to do that.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: What do you believe is the mission statement of the Library of Parliament, for you? What's your principal function? What are you supposed to be doing? I hear a lot of things about a lot of activities. You're doing a lot of things. If you had to do one, or two, or three things, what would they be?

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: We want to be your trusted source of information. Every day, you are the recipient of many sources of information, and people want you to pay attention to various things. We want you to be confident in coming to us and asking for validation, for synthesis of what's out there, in a fashion that meets your needs in what you need to do.

For that, we need various elements. We need the researchers. We need the collection. We need different elements like that. I think that's really what we have to do for Parliament.

I don't know if I'm going to make friends with the library community, but I think we're a knowledge centre, an information centre. We call it a library because that's how it was when it was first created, but that concept goes much further in all the information aspects. We hope we can do that for Parliament.

● (1240)

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you.

Senator Duffy.

Hon. Michael Duffy (Senator, Prince Edward Island (Cavendish), ISG): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you Madame L'Heureux and your team for joining us today. We have been looking forward to this for some time.

In addition to the many other things you organize, you have also organized copyright seminars for lawmakers, which is very important because right now we see all the stories about Cambridge Analytica, Facebook, all the stuff in social media, and of course, the House of Commons has a copyright review under way.

What's the library's policy when it comes to distributing copyright material to users without payment or permission?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: Many of our electronic subscriptions are governed by a user license agreement, and we respect those user license agreements. Most of those are scoped based on a client base, a number we provide to the vendor, and then that will partly determine the subscription price.

We do report our user base to those vendors, and we use the resources within the restrictions of those licensing limitations.

Hon. Michael Duffy: I'm sure you have seen in the news that there are lots of arts and creative people who are very concerned about infringement of their copyright. This is the way they live. If people ignore the copyright or take stuff and don't pay for it, it's very injurious to that community.

In your work on copyright, have you had any discussions with this movement?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: We're certainly very aware, and discuss copyright internally at the library. We do contribute, as well, to Access Copyright, which is a Government of Canada level licence for use of content. We are a library, and we have some provisions under fair dealing in copyright.

Hon. Michael Duffy: Do you always follow the copyright rules?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: Yes.

Hon. Michael Duffy: I have a further question about accessibility. Like Madam Quach, I'm very interested in the digitization and the revolution that's under way.

I want to ask two things. What is the additional material required to make documents accessible?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: Making documents accessible is a question of technology. Accessibility requirements have to do largely with metadata tagging. Those tags provide instructions to adaptive technologies to instruct the technology how to read the content, which makes it easier for somebody with a print disability to navigate and interpret the content. It's largely a software and technology and a metadata question.

Hon. Michael Duffy: Yes. It's embedded in the document when you first create it.

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: That's correct.

Hon. Michael Duffy: Why would you say that document creators in government are so reluctant to give you the originals? Is it out of a fear that they will somehow be edited or changed in some way, subtle or otherwise? Is it only by putting it on paper or in a PDF that they can be certain that what they intend to be the final product gets put up on your website or elsewhere?

Is there a concern with security?

● (1245)

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: I can't necessarily speak from the perspective of the government departments submitting the content.

I'm unable to answer that question.

Hon. Michael Duffy: Does it seem logical to you that this would be a concern?

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: I think some of the challenges that the executive is experiencing is that these documents come from a lot of different departments, and they come in all shapes and sizes and using different products. It could be a Word document. It could be an Excel spreadsheet. It could be a PowerPoint presentation.

The coordination of all of those documents in a format that's accessible and uniform, in terms of transmission to the House for tabling, I suspect is at the core of what they're trying to solve in their conversations—how to do it. It's intensive work. I don't know to what extent there is concern about tampering, if I can paraphrase what you're saying. We're not able to talk about that.

From a process and production perspective, clearly the shapes and sizes of different things purchased by a variety of departments are adding to the complexity of the process.

Hon. Michael Duffy: This may be something the committee could suggest the government find a government-wide solution for, that creation problem.

Thank you.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Thank you, Senator.

Mr. Saroya.

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is to Sonia L'Heureux.

Since you're leaving in June, with all your experience, if it can do some good for the next person coming in, what are the issues that you faced in your lifetime that tied your hands so that you couldn't achieve what you wanted to achieve? Was it money, technology, manpower, or something else? This is just to help us do a better job for the future leader.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: That's a big question. I think that at various times it could be any of those factors.

What I find very helpful, and as many would say, is that though the upcoming closure of Centre Block will be disruptive, it will also be an opportunity for us to look at our service offerings and how equipped we are to support you. It's forcing us to rethink how we provide our services and products to Parliament, because our environment is going to change. We're having to think about what it is going to look like not only for the next year or two but for a 10-year period. Those are things we cannot easily forecast. What is really important, I think—and I hope my successor will do this—is to always be aware of and sensitive to how you work and how you wish to work. We will be developing new branches that are going to be in the new buildings.

One of the things, for example, that I'm aware of and that I talk to my colleagues about is that you have offices in many different buildings. You're going to be what I call a transient population. You're going to go from your office to maybe the main chamber and then a committee room. With all of these movements, how can we help you? How can we provide a space for you that's helpful to you as you go about your business on a daily fashion? At the same time, somebody in your office may want to call us for a document or an analysis, or may need somebody for a guided tour. We need to be agile. That's why our strategic outlook is to look at how we can remain agile and relevant to your needs. We have to be very open to what you're telling us about what you need. Sometimes it might be money to be able to do it. Other times it's just being understanding and aware.

When we ask you if you were satisfied with the service, that's a little bit of what we're after.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I'm confused. You mentioned that the documents are created in digital and then, in the House, changed to paper. When you want to put it back in the system, there is something wrong when you go from the digital to the paper and back to this. Are we looking for some sort of equipment, or is this something where we are short-sighted and we are not helping you to create that. Is this some technical issue, a money issue, or something else? I'm confused. Can you clarify it?

● (1250)

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: The challenge is.... We're starting to drift into procedure here, and I am by no means a procedural person. I don't have those answers. There's a relationship between the producers of those documents and how they're being tabled in the chamber. What I get at the library is what the House provides us, and it's in print.

I'm not in a position to ask the House to give me something in a digital format. They don't have it. It's a question of who can provide that. That's when you start drifting into procedure, and I'm in no way able to answer that question.

I don't know if my colleague has more information...? No.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I have one last question, a tiny one.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Does the technology exist to make PDF files accessible? Does the library own that technology?

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: The technology exists. The library owns the technology. The process to reverse-engineer accessibility into something that we receive in print is really quite labour intensive and was something that was difficult for us to undertake given those previous resourcing limitations in the time we had between 2014 and our appearance here today.

[*Translation*]

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): We will now begin our second round.

Ms. Quach, you have the floor.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Thank you, Madam Chair.

With regard to the votes concerning Library of Parliament expenses, there is in fact a major difference between planned expenditures, authorized votes and real expenditures. I examined the 2015-2016 budget mostly. I think there is a difference of almost $1 million.

How is it that that was not spent? And yet, the planned expenditures were higher and the budget that was authorized was also. Why was that money not spent?

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: I don't have the same data as you.

May I say that 2015-2016 was an election year. It was an election year, and the campaign was quite long. Essentially from July until the end of January or the beginning of February, Parliament did not sit. That had an impact on the amount of money we spent over the year. It was because of the election.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: But the election had been planned.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: Yes, it was planned but...

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: You didn't expect the election campaign to be that long. Neither did we. Ha, ha!

With regard to human resources, how do you ensure that there is a diverse workforce?

For instance, how many francophones, members of cultural minorities, and indigenous people do research to answer the questions on various issues? Do you have that information?

Ms. Lynn Potter: I can provide some information right now. As for the rest, I can certainly provide it later.

Regarding official languages, we have a good balance between English and French as official languages at the library. As for cultural diversity, I don't have the data in hand, but it exists and we can provide the necessary information.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: I'd also like to have the data on indigenous people.

Ms. Lynn Potter: Certainly.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Did you follow quotas, or is this a hiring concern that is taken into account by the head of the library?

Ms. Lynn Potter: It is a concern, and it's very difficult given our small size. Of course, we follow certain rules. We analyze our statistics on a regular basis. In fact, we have just put in place a new human resources and financial system that will be better able to capture that information, and that is not something we could do in the past.

● (1255)

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Fine.

I'd like to go back to the digitization issue. Since you don't necessarily have the power to investigate or ask questions, perhaps we at the committee could ask one of the clerks of the House of Commons who holds the discussions with the Privy Council to testify. Perhaps the committee could do that?

I don't know if I should move a motion, but if that is why the digitization file and the 2014 motion are completely frozen, perhaps we could ask one of the clerks of the House and a member of the Privy Council committee to testify before the end of the parliamentary session.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): That's a good idea. However, I suggest that we let our own clerks find the best people who could provide answers. I suggest that we then ask for a plan.

Rather than doing that through a motion, we could perhaps simply write it in the notes and ask that this be brought up at a meeting before the end of the session.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Fine, that's good.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Does that work for you?

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach: Yes.

The Joint Chair (Hon. Lucie Moncion): Mr. Ouellette, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: I was just wondering when the last review of services was done with members of Parliament and senators.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: Can you specify what you mean by "last review of services?"

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: For instance, I'm a new MP here and have been here for two years and have never had anyone from the Library of Parliament ask my opinion about the services I've received since I've been here. I was wondering when the last time was that the Library of Parliament conducted a review of the services offered.

Sometimes—I have to be honest—I find it very labyrinth-like and very daunting to use all the services, whether to figure out where you're going or to understand which part of the system you need to address yourself to. I'm wondering whether we've actually had a review to maybe streamline those services or make them more user-friendly.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: The exercise in 2012, when we had a budget reduction, was one time when there was input from this committee concerning the service offerings. Since the last election, this committee has not had an opportunity to meet. It would be typically this committee that would be representative of the wider population of parliamentarians.

We have conducted various exercises to seek feedback. We've done it by meeting with chairs of committees. We've met with—I forget the term—chairs of parliamentary associations as well to see how our products or services were responding to the needs of those user groups. We haven't recently done a fulsome, detailed review of all of our services.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: I was wondering also whether you have done a review of your website to make sure that it's very user-friendly.

Ms. Sonia L'Heureux: Yes, we have.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: Okay. To be honest, it actually does seem very nice to use. That's a compliment. I'm just asking the question.

Related to that, I know this is not supposed to be personal, but I was using your catalogue to try to obtain documents, because I am a university researcher and have a lot of experience doing this. I found it much more difficult to use than my university, for instance, to gain access to articles personally. I can get a research report from an analyst on guaranteed annual income, but it might not have all the documentation or the review of the documents that I'm looking for, and I found it very difficult to obtain it.

On one aspect, I found it very onerous so I abandoned using the system of the Library of Parliament and went back to my old university in order to conduct my research.

That leads to another related question. When someone requests information—for instance, asks for the Library of Parliament to buy additional resources or books—what is the usual procedure, and are those usually approved by the Library of Parliament?

I know the answer. Do you?

● (1300)

Ms. Sonia Bebbington: We have a collection development policy that guides most of our decisions along certain lines, including subject area. We do have the latitude to acquire things on request for addition into the collection provided that they would meet the long-term use of the collection along those subject lines. Where something perhaps doesn't meet those subject lines, we will bring the item in by interlibrary loan if we believe that the interest is of short-term use, or if it's an older publication that we just don't happen to have in our collection.

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: At the University of Manitoba and Laval University, if you request a document or a book, the library will actually always buy it, or if you need to have a journal article, you're never refused as a researcher or as a university professor. But I actually have been refused on at least two occasions to order large books, anthologies, which contain lots of research on various materials, which makes my life a little harder because then I say, "Well, if I have to spend $500, now this is my resource in my office only, and it's not the resource of the Library of Parliament." I'm just pointing that out...a shared collective.

I'm going to change the subject very quickly—

The Joint Chair (Mr. Gagan Sikand): Yes, actually....

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette: It's my final question, actually, or maybe I can go to the third round.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Gagan Sikand): The bells have started, and I know Senator Moncion has another committee at 1:30, so I would actually suggest that we perhaps adjourn, but it is up to the committee.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adjourn or suspend? If you'd like, we could continue, but that requires unanimous consent. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adjourn?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Joint Chair (Mr. Gagan Sikand): Thank you, everyone.

The meeting is adjourned.

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